On March 21, three days before Radovan Karadžić was found guilty of ten counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws of war, Bosnian Serb authorities unveiled a plaque naming a student dorm in Karadžić’s name. “We dedicated this place to the man who undoubtedly set the foundation of Republika Srpska – Radovan Karadžić, the first president of this republic,” said Milorad Dodik, the president of the Serbian Republic in Bosnia (“Student dorm” 2016). One week before the ICTY released its verdict on the case of Vojislav Šešelj, who was on trial for three counts of crimes against humanity and six counts of war crimes, Serbian authorities allowed Šešelj to hold a public rally in Belgrade for his political party, Srpska Radikalna Stranka. This was in direct violation of ICTY's condition that Šešelj stays out of public life during his medical leave and ICTY's subsequent order that he return to The Hague after he violated this condition. At the rally Šešelj confirmed his intentions to go into electoral victory rather than to The Hague (Rovčanin 2016; “Radikali” 2016).

In the international media Karadžić's trial and guilty verdict have been referred to as Europe's biggest accomplishment since Nuremberg, while Šešelj’s acquittal has been referred to as one that seeks to rewrite history and “a victory for advocates of ethnic cleansing” (Borger 2016; “Vojislav” 2016; Biddle 2016). The international reaction is a stark contrast to the domestic response to the two trials among Serbs in Serbia and Bosnia. The accusers – the ICTY and the international media, and the accused – alleged war criminal and the Serbian media therefore abide by entirely different rules of communication, speaking past each other. There is no dialogue between the two camps, only two disconnected narratives. The tale of the ICTY is one of a power-hungry war criminal whose manipulations resulted in atrocities and crimes against humanity, while Karadžić’s tale is a history of a nation
simply ensuring its survival in face of mistreatment by other nations, and misrepresentation and shame at a global level. This paper illustrates how the accused construct and mobilize the second narrative and how the local media transmits the war criminal cult script to the local communities. Understanding how the war criminal cult is created and transmitted helps us to understand why ordinary Serbs participate in the heroization of war criminals rather than actively distance themselves from horrendous crimes, which is exactly what the Tribunal is trying to avoid.

This paper analyzes Karadžić and Šešelj’s ‘performances’ at The Hague and the Serbian media’s consumption of these acts. In their performances Karadžić and Šešelj mobilize nationalism through five steps. First, the accused diffuse their individual guilt by collectivizing the crimes that they are accused of. Second, they epitomize The Hague as the ultimate enemy by associating the Tribunal with NATO forces and their operations. Third, they construct Serbs as the biggest victims of the international justice process. Fourth, they produce themselves as the sacrificial lambs of this process – martyrs who embody the victimhood of the Serbian nation. Fifth, they embark on what they present as a mission to recover the dignity of the nation in face of undeserved shame through mockery and ridicule of the Tribunal.

The production of Serbian nationalism from above in the 1980s and 1990s and its role in the wars and elections in the region has been studied extensively. However, there is little material examining international trials as moments of nationalist mobilization. I argue that alleged war criminals not only use the podium of the Tribunal to create continuation of the nationalist narrative from previous decades but also to reinterpret and tailor it to their needs. Since nationalism does not exist on its own but is ‘made’ we need to pay attention to important events which actors can use to initiate twists and turns in the nationalist narrative. Karadžić and Šešelj have a clever scheme of making the Serbs guilty by association, only to offer a supposed solution to this collective guilt – the recovery of dignity through the interpretation of The Hague as the imperial West. The war criminal cult is thus ‘made’ in conversation with the imperial West in a collective narrative that contests the legitimacy and the intention of The Hague while disguising individual
responsibility. The media co-produces and amplifies this story of domestic challenge to the hierarchy in the distribution of global power, influence over international institutions, and hegemony over the interpretation of history, which resonates among the public that feels implicated in the crimes.

By ‘war criminal cult’ I mean the phenomenon through which a national leader, in this case a war criminal, solidifies himself into a cult leader who then enjoys the public’s support to act outside of international law and basic moral standards. Through this process a war criminal produces himself into a trustworthy individual, one more legitimate than an international institution. This paper is thus interested in understanding nationalist narratives that enable the public to grant amnesty and forgiveness for the most horrendous of crimes. It does not make a judgment in regards to the trial proceedings or the verdicts in the two cases. In that sense it does not evaluate the effectiveness of the international tribunal.

In an attempt to problematize the war criminal cult, I apply Roger Brubaker’s renown theoretical work on ‘groupism’ to explain the ways in which and the conditions under which “powerful crystallization of group feeling” takes place. Brubaker’s “Ethnicity Without Groups” is extremely helpful in understanding Karadžić and Šešelj’s collectivization of guilt during performances at The Hague. In From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict Jack Snyder explains top-down nationalist mythmaking and the limitations of media during elections. I apply Snyder’s theoretical framework to explain nationalist mythmaking and the role of media during a different, yet still key, event – international trials of leaders.

The evidence is based on a discourse analysis of Karadžić and Šešelj’s speeches at The Hague, and the framing of the two trials by major Serbian newspapers. I therefore analyze what the accused say on the international stage and how the Serbian media respond and reinforce their nationalist frames. This is complemented by data I collected for my book project, which involved extensive fieldwork in Serbia and Bosnia from 2010 to 2013 and was composed of semi-structured interviews with university professors and students, community leaders,
top echelon and lower rank staff in international organizations and institutions, civil society members, government officials, and members of the opposition.

I chose to look at the two cases for several reasons. While the Slobodan Milošević case has been studied in depth by a number of scholars, the cases of Karadžić and Šešelj have surprisingly received little attention among academics. Second only to Milošević, Karadžić was the most powerful political figure on trial at the ICTY. As Marko Milanović explains,

Karadžić was not a mere cog in the machine, nor even a military figure, but a politician at the very top of the pyramid, or the joint criminal enterprise, which devised and orchestrated this policy. In short, he is the best substitute for Milošević that the Tribunal will ever have, and his trial will therefore be of tremendous symbolic importance (2009, 216-7).

Šešelj was considered to be the most entertaining and the most intelligent figure at The Hague. “Watching Šešelj in court is like watching Big Brother,”¹ commented one of my interviewees in Banja Luka (Ivan Šijaković, Interview, July 12, 2011).

Moreover, the two characters on trial are quite dissimilar and have in the past competed for political power against each other. They had a very different reaction to their Hague indictments – while Karadžić went into hiding in plain sight, Šešelj voluntarily surrendered. Most recently, they received very different ICTY verdicts – while Karadžić was found guilty on ten counts and given a forty-year sentence, Šešelj was acquitted. Despite the different circumstances surrounding the two trials, both Karadžić and Šešelj saw the international stage as a key opportunity to invoke memories of the brutal wars and key debates that have occupied the Serbian consciousness in their aftermath. Once they grabbed the attention of their audience by ‘grouping’ guilt, the stage was set for further construction of the war criminal cult.

¹ The interviewee is referring to the popular television reality show Big Brother, rather than the character from George Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.
Background on the two trials

The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) issued the initial indictment and arrest warrant for Radovan Karadžić on July 25, 1995. During the decade that followed, the reactions of the authorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republika Srpska were negligible, with neither republic willing to carry out its obligation for executing the warrants for the arrest. This situation led the Trial Chamber and the President of the ICTY to conclude that the failure of the indictment was “wholly due to” Serbian governments’ “refusal to cooperate,” which was reinforced by harsh words from the President of the UN Security Council who not only condemned the actions of the Serbian governments but threatened the introduction of economic sanctions (UN Document No. S/1996/556 and UN Document No. S/PRST/1996/34 qtd. in “International” 1997). The main reason for continuing inaction by the Serbs was believed to be the position of authority Karadžić occupied among Serbian ruling elites in post-war times and the general support he enjoyed as a national hero of the war in Bosnia.

At last, on July 21, 2008, and thirteen years after his indictment and arrest warrant were issued, the Serbian authorities arrested Karadžić in the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Since Karadžić was one of the most sought-after fugitives from international criminal justice and, according to the international and Serb authorities, was believed to be hiding quite successfully, the circumstances of his arrest were surprising, if not “downright bizarre” (Milanović 2009, 213). Not only was Karadžić found in Belgrade, rather than some remote and inaccessible location, but he had been residing and working in the capital as Dr. Dragan David Dabić, a practitioner of alternative medicine, who sported a long white beard tied in a top-knot. Karadžić, a psychiatrist by training, wrote articles for a journal *A Healthy Life*, ran his own website, gave public lectures, and even guest-appeared on television shows promoting his teachings in new age medicine as Dr. Dabić (“Footage” 2008; Lippman 2008, 38). The peculiarities of this case continued as the accused boycotted the first day of his trial – October 29, 2009, with the trial finally resuming on March 1, 2010. The affair begun with two days, and in total six hours, of opening
statements by Karadžić. Unsurprisingly, Serbian newspapers, alongside many from the international press, scrambled to capture the highlights.

Unlike, Karadžić, Vojislav Šešelj voluntarily surrendered to the ICTY in late February 2003 after an indictment of fifteen counts of crimes against humanity and violations of the laws of war. Among other crimes, Šešelj was accused of inflammatory speech and participation in joint criminal enterprise including numerous crimes committed by his paramilitary militia called Šešelj’s Men. Šešelj’s Men are accused of acts of looting, killing, rape illegal imprisonment, forced deportation, torture and persecution against Croats, Muslims and other non-Serbs. Šešelj voluntarily surrendered to the ICTY because, in his own words, he “relish[ed] the prospect of an international audience for his denunciations of Western policy in the Balkans” (Simpson 2003, A6). Realizing how well the ICTY trials could be manipulated for propaganda purposes, Šešelj and his supporters insisted that Šešelj’s trial be broadcast on national television like Milošević’s trial was.² They threatened that if the government did not agree to broadcast Šešelj’s trial they would urge supporters of the Radical Party of Serbia to organize protest rallies and to refuse to pay the monthly license fee for the national television network (Predrag Marković, Interview, July 26, 2011). In 2006 Šešelj went on a hunger strike demanding that he be granted the right to present his own defense, which was granted to him by the ICTY.

As he is the leader of the third most popular party in Serbia, Srpska Radikalna Stranka, he continued to be politically active from The Hague and continued running in the general elections. In 2011 Šešelj argued that his case should be dropped based on the violation of his right to be tried in a reasonable amount of time, but the ICTY refused his bid. However, in 2014 the ICTY granted Šešelj a provisional release based on deteriorating health and a cancer diagnosis, which required him to stay out of public life. Šešelj violated the condition and vowed

² USAID’s decision to fund the broadcasting of Milošević’s trial was self-defeating as it led to the doubling of Milošević’s approval ratings and contributed to an upsurge in defensive nationalism (Lelyveld 2002).
not to return to The Hague voluntarily. The ICTY responded by summoning Šešelj to return but then dropped the summons, averting a stand-off between the Serbian government and the European Union, which would have included EU sanctions on Serbia. The ICTY issued a statement accepting the Serbian government’s claim that Šešelj’s treatment could not be continued at The Hague ("Hague" 2016). How exactly medical facilities in Belgrade are better equipped to serve Šešelj than those at The Hague was not explained in the statement and, frankly, would be very difficult to believe. Šešelj was acquitted on March 31 in what international media has branded a very controversial and unusual finding. The acquittal was based on the decision of two judges while the third judge expressed strong dissent (Bowcott 2016).

One of my interviewees described Šešelj quite accurately as “hyper-educated, hyper-intelligent, and hyper-crazy” (Nebojša Randjelković, Interview, June 22, 2011). Šešelj’s maneuvering of his ICTY case was part of his quest for fame. Over the past twelve years he made media headlines for his vulgar insults and expletives aimed at ICTY officials, and for his claims that the ICTY is an illegal court constructed by Western intelligence agencies. Nationalist and many moderate Serbs find Šešelj’s performances at the ICTY very entertaining.

The archetype of the national narcissist

It may be easy and even desirable to dismiss the two individuals and the peculiar circumstances surrounding their cases as affairs of two ‘madmen.’ The problem in doing so is that the sensationalism that these individuals employ and the narratives that the ‘madmen’ preach do not remain in the courtroom but are transmitted through the media transition belt and resonate among members of their nation. G.R. Weaver (2006) gives us some insight into how certain types of individuals—national narcissists, a category in which we can certainly place Karadžić and Šešelj—function in groups. Weaver maintains that:

The individual national narcissist finds proof of his own nation’s superiority in his co-nationalists’ successes, and proof of the injustice of his own failures in the knowledge of his own nation’s superiority … Collective superiority is ‘true,’ as is the ‘fact’ of other nations’ comparative collective inferiority (2006, 64).
Similarly Benjamin Peterson argues that narcissists attempt to transfer their own beliefs and goals to group identities and may use group identity to “assist in defensive self-regulation of important aspects of the personal self, especially when threatened” (2009, 7). I find that Karadžić and Šešelj collectivize their guilt as the guilt imposed on their nation, consequently claiming victimhood status for themselves via their nation. In the process they ‘embody’ the Serbian nation, which gives them enormous symbolic power. They thus live “off” and “for” nationalism and have what Peirre Bourdieu and Roger Brubaker refer to as a “performative” character (Brubaker 2002, 166).

I. Collectivizing guilt

The objective of the ICTY is retributive justice in the form of punishment of particular individuals, or the removal of “bad apples,” in order to distance the rest of the group from moral responsibility for atrocities, and pave the way for inter-group reconciliation. Carla Del Ponte, chief prosecutor in Slobodan Milošević’s trial, clarified the legal logic of individual criminal responsibility by explaining that “No state or organization is on trial here today. The indictments do not accuse an entire people of being collectively guilty of the crimes, even the crime of genocide” (Del Ponte 4). Therefore, the ICTY’s accusations make direct reference to Karadžić and Šešelj, and in particular, the way they participated in the Balkan wars. However, despite ICTY’s intention, I argue that a major theme that emerged in the examination of narratives, interactions, and discussions in Karadžić and Šešelj’s trials is a disregard for this legal criterion of individual responsibility.

In his defense statements Karadžić only spoke in collective terms - in defense of the nation, rather than himself: “All the time we defended ourselves. We never embarked on trying to conquer Muslim territories.” Karadžić ended his own legal defence with a statement that is a defense of the Serbian nation. He even spoke directly to the Serbian audience rather than court officials:

See also Morf & Rhodewalt 2001.
Gentlemen, the truth is on our side and it will only go stronger. We did everything in our power to avoid the war and to minimize the consequences and damages. There is no statue of limitation that will run out on that and lies aren’t subject to statutes of limitations and we will live to see it (Defence statement, 16 October 2012).

Karadžić was also very clear about intending to prioritize the Serbian audience at home over Tribunal staff present at his trial. At a closed session on 15 June 2009 he stated: I will present all my views in a public hearing. The public at large is, as I said, one of the rare allies that I have.”

Šešelj’s self-defense was also rooted in a narrative that defends wartime actions of Serbs as a ‘group:

And what kind of people would we Serbs be if we had not stood up for our own rights? ... How could we Serbs be expected to stand by and watch if somebody’s putting in jeopardy our brothers and sisters in Croatia? We could not sit on our hands. We had to fight and protect them (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012).

Through this process Šešelj and Karadžić reproduced ‘Serbs’ as a distinct and unified group and constructed themselves as an extension of that collective. They appealed to their audience’s emotions by evoking ideals of truth, honor, national unity and loyalty. Šešelj and Karadžić are ideal examples of Brubaker’s “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” who invoke groups in order to “evoke them, summon them, call them into being” (2002, 166). Brubaker further explains how the reification of a group “can be momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice” (2002, 167). I argue that the defendants succeeded at making the political fiction of the unified (and collectively-guilty) Serbian nation ‘real’ at the Tribunal, which in turn enabled them to construct The Hague as the ultimate enemy of that nation.

II. Producing The Hague as the ultimate enemy

During their ‘performances’ Kardžić and Šešelj turned the tables and produced “the West” as the guilty party. Šešelj continuously argued that the charges against him were rooted in the West’s hostility for Serbia and that the Tribunal functioned under the instruction of “Western intelligence services” replacing “the American Cavalry, the American Sixth Fleet” (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012). He
emphasized that the ICTY was a biased, illegal court, and the political arm of NATO in NATO’s military campaign against Serbia. “You are my enemies because you come from countries which are members of NATO and which are hostile to my motherland, Serbia,” said Šešelj (“Dr. Šešelj” 2013). Speaking directly to the Tribunal judges, Šešelj continued:

Gentlemen, if you were objective and unbiased you would have never agreed to be judges of this illegal court, and since you accepted this calling you also accepted to deliver its task. All of you come from countries that are members of NATO, which bombed Serbia ruthlessly. For three months you killed Serbian children, and you are trying to convince me that you are unbiased?” (“Dr. Šešelj” 2013).

At certain points in his closing statement Šešelj identified specific ‘enemies’ of Serbia, such as “pro-Western forces in England, Germany, the United States, the entire European Union, the Vatican” (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012).

Karadžić also made a link between the Tribunal and NATO, accusing the Tribunal of being implicated in what he said was a NATO raid of his family’s home. This resulted in Judge Bonomy asking Karadžić to “call NATO headquarters in Brussels” instead of making such accusations against The Hague. Judge Bonomy emphasized “what it is you are claiming is the link to the Tribunal?” (Status conference, 19 January 2009). Karadžić was undoubtedly aware that the ICTY, which is a body of the United Nations, and NATO are two different intergovernmental organizations. In making the link between the two Karadžić meant to imply that the ICTY and NATO are ruled by the same Western forces. Since according to Karadžić, “NATO is really the great problem of the world, in general,” he meant to associate the Tribunal with the biggest enemy of the world, and by default – the Serbs (Status conference, 19 January 2009).

The goal here was to characterize the Tribunal as an element of what the accused explained as the violent Western campaign against the entire Serbian nation. Tying painful memories of the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia to the present day work of the Tribunal was Šešelj’s powerful tool in deflecting responsibility from his own actions during the wars. There is no better defense than an offense that suggests that the Tribunal is part of a Western alliance that killed Serbian children.
for three months. The invention of this new ultimate threat to the nation resulted in the “crystallization of group feeling” and continued the reification of the fictional, one, and unified, Serbian nation at The Hague (Brubaker 2002, 167).

**III. Producing the Serbs as the ultimate victims**

Once the accused produced the new “offender” – The Hague, they could construct the Serbs (as a group) into the new victim. Šešelj emphasized ICTY “injustice” against the Serbs who “are tried to life at the drop of a hat, and the Muslims, for example, you engage in very heated discussions as to whether a Muslim general is going to get two years’ or three years’ sentence” (Defence statement, 16 October 2012). Karadžić argued that the Tribunal was mistaken in its targeting of the Serbs because “it is a terrible misconception and a great injustice, this portrayal of the Serbs as those who started the war in BiH” (Defence statement, 16 October 2012). He wished to correct the storyline by explaining how Serbs in Bosnia were victimized:

> Then came a period of underhand dealings and blockages in establishing the authorities. The Serbs could not get the posts they were promised, a Serb could not become head of MUP, marginalization started...What the Serbs had lived through in areas where they were less than 50 percent... for an entire year not a single community in Europe would put up with that, with the humiliation, even rapes and murders...” (Defence statement, 16 October 2012).

The purpose of such descriptive statements of Serbian victimhood during the war in Bosnia was to recycle the view that had it not been for Karadžić’s creation and defense of Republika Srpska Serbs would have been ethnically cleansed from Bosnia, or included as an oppressed minority in a Croat-Bosniak Federation. Because Karadžić was the wartime president of the Serbian separatist portion of BiH, he wished to portray himself as the savior of the Serbian nation in Bosnia.

Despite ICTY’s numerous efforts to emphasize that its trials are about individual responsibility, Karadžić and Šešelj suggested that the trials are about writing group history. Both defendants made it their mission to ‘write’ the Serbs as the victims in the historical tale. The ICTY was, to use Brubaker’s terms, the
“dramatic event” that provided the opportunity for these political entrepreneurs to “galvanize and crystallize” that narrative and also to “ratchet up pre-existing levels of groupness” (Brubaker 2002, 171). Karadžić went through detailed explanations of how the conflict unraveled and ‘corrected’ the Prosecutor in his understanding of the events. He gave context as well as detailed accounts of political and military events, and his place in them (Defence statement, 16 October 2012). His entire defence was an extremely long history lecture with Karadžić as the key author, making his place in history and suggesting how he wished to be remembered. Šešelj also made his intention to rewrite the Prosecutor’s version of history clear. He explained that “What will remain behind me here are the transcripts from the trial. These are not going to be your personal perceptions of the proceedings.” He then continued to suggest that his account is the true one while making a mockery of the Court and the Prosecutor’s version: “Someday people will probably laugh at your judgment and they will laugh even more at the indictment and the closing argument of the Prosecutor” (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012).

IV. Martyrdom and self-embodiment of the nation

In addition to producing the Serbs as the ultimate victim group, the accused portrayed themselves as the representatives of Serbian victimhood at The Hague. Both Karadžić and Šešelj emphasized that the court violated their human rights. During his first appearance at The Hague Šešelj cunningly portrayed procedures taken for his own protection as mistreatment, “torture,” and disrespect:

I have been exposed to physical torture and mistreatment today because upon leaving the prison 20 kg heavy flat jacket was put on me and I consider this to be torture prohibited by international law. I do not need any flat jacket. I am not in any danger ... In a civilized world if there is danger an armored vehicle is provided (First initial appearance, 26 February 2003).

He also emphasized that the Trial Chamber denied him “the right to finance [his] defence” and offered assistance that was “very limited and very restricted.” Šešelj went as far as to accuse the ICTY of a conspiracy to “kill” him. It is not entirely clear that his accusation was purely figurative and that he was speaking about ICTY’s
intention to remove him politically rather than literally:

Now, so much for the political background of this trial and the intentions of their main creators. They designed to kill me sometime between the closing argument and the rendering of the judgment. This was one of their attempts, and I’m sure that they will not give up so easily, particularly now when there is election campaign underway and the results are showing in the polls that the Serbian Radical Party is in a good position and that it will achieve good election results (Defense Closing Statement, 14 March 2012)

Conflating his political and literal ‘death’ was likely a strategy of monopolizing on the Serbian audience’s bad memories of Milošević’s passing while in ICTY custody. It was also a way of ensuring that the ICTY grants him a medical release.

Karadžić also claimed that the Tribunal was acting against his rights in a statement where he suggested that his family’s residence was searched by NATO forces under the order of or in connection to the Tribunal and with the aim to obstruct his defence:

And then, en passant, [NATO] tried to requisition documents that I found it difficult to amass, relating to my assets and so on and so forth and with respect to the registry’s decision to provide financial resources to me. So this is -- they refer to this Tribunal, because they are searching for two men, two fugitives, and within the frameworks of their searches, they found it necessary to attack my family (Status conference, 19 January 2009).

In this statement Karadžić was conflating the Tribunal with NATO, and trying to link the Tribunal to violent acts and the violation of his and his family’s rights. As an ICTY defense attorney told me, the defendants benefited from the fact that the Serbian audience did not realize that in each case the defence team goes to The Hague to see whether they can defend and minimize the sentence but, if they feel that the possibility is small, “they play politics and do not play by the rules, they discredit and insult the court and its laws” (Toma Višnjić, Interview, August 4, 2012).

Not only did the defendants want to portray themselves as the embodiment of Serbian victimhood but they also wanted to produce themselves as the ‘saviors’ of the nation. The previous section illustrated how the defendants manipulated the
historical dialogue to draw continuity between the idea that the Serbian nation needed ‘saving’ in the past – during the war, and today – at The Hague. This narrative allowed the defendants to embody the ‘suffering’ and the pain of the nation. “Every shell that fell on Sarajevo hurt me personally ... I proposed that Sarajevo be demilitarized. That was rejected. I proposed that it be placed under UN administration. That was rejected,” explained Karadžić in a statement meant to reaffirm his internalization of national pain and his attempt to ‘save’ Sarajevo (Defence statement, 16 October 2012). The most cited quotation in the Serbian press after Karadžić’s opening statement was his declaration: “I will not defend my triviality but the grandness of the Serbian nation” (“Branim” 2010; “Holandani” 2008; “Suđenje” 2010; “Karadžić: Mene” 2010). The quotation was undeniably cunning because its paradoxical tone served a double purpose. Karadžić was able to claim the status of a representative of a “grand” nation, while his characterization of himself as “trivial,” “insignificant,” and, in direct translation, “small” averted the negative consequences resulting from the arrogance and pompousness of assuming that post for himself. Moreover, the quote cleverly implied that Karadžić was willing to sacrifice his personal trial for the honor of the nation, making it seem disingenuous.

Martyrdom elements were also evident in Šešelj’s speeches. Šešelj went out of his way to point out his lifetime commitment to the Serbian nation, including prison sentences:

God forbid that you should praise me or have a good opinion of me. That would be a problem. As early as 1984 I was convicted to eight years in prison for the same ideas. I wanted the artificial Muslim nation abolished. I wanted the artificial Montenegrin nation abolished. I wanted the number of federal units in Yugoslavia reduced. And I demanded that the personality cult of the communist dictator Tito be toppled. That was the gist of my manuscript that was seized from me as a manuscript, and for that I received a sentence of eight years’ imprisonment. Do you think that that could turn me? The prison in Zenica was much harder than this one in Scheveningen and it still could not shake my views and beliefs (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012).

From this statement it became evident that Šešelj sought to embody the ‘struggle’
for the Serbian nation. He portrayed his life as a ‘battle’ against all the threats to the Serbian nation – the Muslims, the Montenegrins, the federalists, the communists, and, today, the Tribunal. Indeed, if the Tribunal praised or had a good opinion of Šešelj this would have created a problem for him as he built his persona in opposition to what he identified as the ultimate enemy of the Serbian nation – The Hague. In this process Šešelj sought to identify himself as the one, true Serbian martyr. It is ironic that he commented on trying to break the personality cult of the communist leader Tito, when he was simultaneously building a cult of the nationalist/war criminal leader for himself.

**V. Mockery, ridicule and the superiority complex**

The last step in the production of the war criminal cult is what the defendants portray as a mission to recover the dignity of the nation in face of undeserved shame through mockery and ridicule of the Tribunal. Karadžić’s favourite tool for ridiculing the trial process involved the use of his double identity as Dragan Dabić. During his initial appearance at The Hague Karadžić declared: “I have an invisible advisor but I’ve decided to represent myself [he then laughed]” (Initial appearance, 31 July 2008). Another time he stated that his team of advisers at The Hague includes at least two “invisible” consultants because his zodiac sign is Gemini, which apparently provided proof that his Dabić persona is to some degree genuine and not a complete act of a fugitive (Milanović 2009, 218). When Karadžić was confronted about Dabić he declared that “Dabić did not do anything that Karadžić would not do,” and refused to acknowledge any inconsistency in his character:

> While Radovan Karadžić was a physician in scientific medicine, Dabić practiced traditional medicine, which has been around for thousands of years. I believe that the two types of medicine are valuable and should be integrated... In that sense, doctor Dabić was Radovan Karadžić and the other way around” (”Suđenje” 2010).

Karadžić’s Babić was a way of illustrating his intellectual superiority over Western forces. This was a sly act that allowed him to avoid his capture and delay his trial while living publicly in the capital of Serbia and he was obviously proud of it.
From his very first appearance Šešelj used his trial as an opportunity to
display his mastery of mockery:

In my country it is customary for the judges, the prosecutors and civil
employees to wear normal, decent, civil clothing. I am frustrated when I
see the judges wear strange clothing … this associates me with the
inquisition of the Roman Catholic church and psychologically I find this
unacceptable and I insist that everyone should wear normal civilian
clothing (First initial appearance, 26 February 2003).

Through this statement Šešelj did not only intend to ridicule formal robes in the
Western legal tradition but also to paint Serbs as ‘civilized’ and secular, and the
Tribunal as a backward imperial institution conducting witch-trials. He regularly
disrespected employees of the Tribunal through his claims that, for example, “there
are a lot of illiterate and uneducated people among the Judges, among the
Prosecutors” (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012). He emphasized his
intellectual and moral superiority by suggesting that the he is “not afraid of the
lawyers whose main concern is not to be in the good book of the Registry because
they are expecting favors from them” (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012).
Šešelj arrogantly boasted about touring the Serbian front lines during the war and
firing from automatic rifles towards the Croatian positions (Defence closing
statement, 14 March 2012). The goal of such ‘performances’ was a display of his
heroism and superiority for the Serbian audiences watching the televised
proceedings at home.

Unlike Karadžić, whose main concern was setting a historical record and his
place in it, Šešelj also had goals for the present and the future. While Karadžić’s
political career ended with the end of the war, Šešelj was still the leader of the
Radical Party of Serbia and sought to win votes in national elections. This meant that
during his trial he painted his political opponents in Serbia as Western sympathizers
and referred to the Serbian authorities as “pro-Western traitor regime in Belgrade”
and “mafiosos and criminals” (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012). He
argued that the key reason why he was on trial was because The Hague made a
political deal with the Serbian authorities to remove him from politics, because he
was a threat to the Western-backed factions in the elections. Šešelj actively tried to
build a cult for himself as the only true Serbian patriot and consistently emphasized his agency and unwillingness to be subjected to any authority. In this process he reinforced the idea of a single honest man in a battle against a machine. “I am going into election victory, not The Hague,” said Šešelj when ICTY ordered him to return to The Hague (Rovčanin 2016). The goal here was to disrespect the entire process, to turn the court into one big joke while emphasizing his heroism and superiority for the Serbian audiences at home:

The Hague Tribunal, instead of being the basis of new international law and international justice, it will actually become a mockery of international judiciary system. And nobody will be glad to refer to the precedents that were established here and the judgments that were issued and passed here,

said Šešelj in his closing statement (Defence closing statement, 14 March 2012).

**Media as the transmission belt for the war criminal cult**

The following section of the paper illustrated how Karadžić and Šešelj’s war criminal cult was transmitted and reproduced for the domestic audience through domestic media sources. The tendency of the media to transmit and reproduce the cult without provoking a debate and offering a critique of the defendants’ speeches was largely a result of the state of the media in Serbia and Republika Srpska. Journalists Without Borders places Serbia 63rd on the 2013 World Press Freedom Index which includes 179 countries in total. The rankings are not particularly alarming. Nevertheless, my interviewees were particularly negative about the state of the media in Serbia. In general they argued that there are no, or very few, independent media sources. The editor of *Dnevne Novine* and the editor of *Svedok* explained that freedom of media is an economic issue in Serbia (Žarko Kesić, Interview, August 30, 2011; Milan Dimić, Interview, August 31, 2011). What these editors emphasized is that journals that claim to be self-funded are in reality dependent on funding from their supporters who belong to particular political factions and expect their political inclinations to be reflected in the media that they support. Pešić, former diplomat and an MP in Serbia, summarized this reality:
“There is no freedom of media – economically dependent is not independent” (Interview, August 10, 2011).

Srbobron Branković, CEO of TNS Medium Gallup in Serbia, a company focusing on public opinion, media and market research which conducts regular surveys and reports of public opinion in the Balkans, confirmed that “media buying is controlled by the state, so you can write critically but the state will be aware of it and will have a chance to respond” (Interview, August 11, 2011). The editor of Svedok, Dimić, expressed his view that while during Slobodan Milošević’s regime one could be killed for uttering the wrong words, today oppression of the media is equally harsh but takes on a more sophisticated form. “The big guys that used to wear leather jackets and gold chains are now in suits. They cut off the advertisements and the funds if you say the wrong thing,” said Dimić (Interview, August 31, 2011).4

The media in Serbia subscribe to status quo opinions, because, as Ratko Božović writes, “[m]edia which is not independent of authoritarian culture have been distanced from the ideals of tolerance, non-violence, common life, and civil rights” (2009, 165). Instead of providing a variety of stimulating, challenging, and critical approaches, the media is limited to the nationalist narrative and the Europeanization narrative. In Serbia this means that the narrative is either one that focuses on counting casualty numbers, equalizing guilt on all sides, and constructing conspiracy theories, or one whose primary goal is to be explicitly pro-European. Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volcic examine two daily newspapers in Serbia – Blic and Večernje Novosti – and identify the characteristics of “nationalistic journalism” as conforming to authority, conventions, the dominant common sense, and mainstream nationalistic principle (2007, 81). Within this narrative journalists emphasize “historic symbolic glories and territories” and reinforce “us vs. them” reporting, which is “extremely one-sided and lacking information on complex issues such as Islam, terrorism, Europe, crime, and independence” (Erjavec and Volcic 2007, 81). Journalists in Serbia and Republika Srpska continuously contemplate upon ideas of

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4 See also Božović 2009.
present-day conspiracies against the Serbs, as well as the reemergence of historical empires, such as Austria-Hungary and the Ottomans, and the re-Nazification of Europe ("Ganić" 2010; "Karadžić 2010; "Monstrum" 2010; "Suđenje" 2010). In the words of one of my interviewees, “they themselves are stuck in old stories” (Sonja Biserko, Interview, June 24, 2012).

This outcome is not surprising if we consider Snyder’s argument about the dangers of the newly freed press in infant democracies. Snyder cautions that in such contexts the press can become “a vehicle for nationalist appeals” rather than an antidote to manipulative political actors (2000, 41). Snyder also points out that democratization was smoothest in places where powerful elites were given a comfortable exit – a “golden parachute” (2000, 41). Following this logic we could anticipate that placing Karadžić and Šešelj on trial at The Hague, which involved shame and blame at the international level rather than a comfortable exit, was not going to sit well with these powerful elites. We should not be surprised at their use of the international podium as a message board for the domestic press. In a setting where current and past ‘enemy’ nations and the constant threat of imperialism and subjugation to foreign powers are prominent themes, the discourse that Karadžić and Šešelj produced at The Hague was welcomed in the press. The Serbian press extensively circulated the five elements of the war criminal cult, which became the main narrative on the ground.

*The five elements of the war criminal cult in the press*

An analysis of the discourse in the Serbian press indicates that the key, and the most problematic, implication of language, rhetoric, and symbols in the news reports is the collectivization of the trials. In the case of Karadžić, the ICTY sought to address his guilt on three major crime bases: the siege of Sarajevo, the Srebrenica genocide, and the crimes in the remaining 27 municipalities (Milanović 2009). However, the key theme emerging in the newspaper narratives deals with questions of “why” the war was fought, “why” Yugoslavia fell apart, and “who” was responsible for these events. Most importantly, the third element of “who” was responsible for these acts is not presented in individual but group terms. A popular newspaper in Serbia
bluntly chose Karadžić’s statement “I defend the people, not myself” as its headline (“Branim” 2010). It is unfortunate that, on that same day, Dnevni-Avaz in the Croatian-Bosniak Federation confirmed this suggestion that Serbs, rather than Karadžić, were being tried, by emphasizing in its headline, albeit in disbelief and mockery of Karadžić, that “Serbs did not need and desire the war, Muslims and Croats did” (“Monstrum” 2010).

The pervasiveness of the group, rather than individual, level analysis in the discourse was not only evident in the headlines, but throughout the text of the articles. Politika, a well-respected newspaper believed to have an educated audience in Serbia, organized its report on Karadžić’s trial in two major themes: “Serbs are not responsible for Markale,” referring to the mass murder of Muslim civilians at a busy market in Sarajevo, and “Serbs did not want a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Ganić 2010). Karadžić’s argument was thus reproduced in Politika and the authors and editors of the news report did not bother to specify that the claims were made according to Karadžić, making it appear as if the arguments represent the opinion of the newspaper. Blic, enjoyed by ordinary folks in Serbia, emphasized Karadžić’s willingness to “defend his nation and their reasons for war, which were just and divine,” and concluded with Karadžić’s words: “we have a strong case with strong evidence” (“Suđenje” 2010). The use of the word “divine” in Karadžić’s reference to the reasons for the war, was likely a strategic move intended to symbolize holy notions of the Serbian nation popular among Serb extremists, which the press obviously consumed.

The production of the Tribunal as part of the Western coalition against Serbia, and thus the ultimate enemy in the story, was obvious in the reports on Šešelj’s trial. There is no media analysis of Šešelj’s potential culpability but a focus on his legal opinion in regards to the alleged illegality of the ICTY and the threat this institution poses to the Serbian nation, which is in need of defense from global giants. The key theme in an article written by a historian in Politika is the power imbalance and the problematic relationship between Serbia and the United States. And while the article is supposed to be about Šešelj’s trial the author provides no discussion about the crimes that Šešelj is accused of (Antić 2015).
Moreover, the link that Karadžić and Šešelj made between NATO and The Hague was extremely well received in the Serbian press. This was reinforced by the fact that the Tribunal delivered Karadžić’s guilty verdict on the seventeenth anniversary of the NATO bombing of Serbia. While international media celebrated Karadžić’s guilty verdict as a monumental accomplishment on March 24th 2016, Serbian media was filled with stories about child victims of the NATO bombing. For example, Prime Minister of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, declared at a commemoration ceremony that

There is no justification for, no reason for, and no meaning to [the death of child victims], and there is only a warning for us and for the [NATO aggressors] – they have to take a stand before God for the spilled blood – yes it was blood, not a coincidence, or collateral damage. Yes, this was a killing of children, not a struggle for democracy and freedom (Spalović 2016).

The rationality behind ICTY’s decision to choose March 24th as the day to deliver Karadžić’s verdict is unclear but unfortunately feeds well into the nationalist narrative that the international community was against Serbs seventeen years ago and still is today. Distancing itself from NATO activity might have been a better strategy if the goal of the Tribunal was to emphasize Karadžić’s individual guilt. Instead, the Serbian press assisted Karadžić in his quest to embody Serbian victimhood.

Šešelj also managed to secure the mantle of Serbian victimhood through the transmission belt of the Serbian press. After ICTY’s demand that Šešelj end his medical leave and return to The Hague legal experts in Serbia responded by writing articles in popular newspapers advising the Serbian government not to extradite Šešelj. The dialogue centered around The Hague treating Serbia with disrespect and infringing on its independence and sovereignty, rather than Šešelj himself (Vujin 2016; Vučić 2016). The argument rang true even among those who did not identify themselves as Šešelj’s fans. A historian who identified himself as a non-supporter of Šešelj argued in his article that a democratic and sovereign nation can not give up its citizen to such a “fake court” even if he is a politically controversial figure (Antić 2015).
The defendants’ argument that the Tribunal is a space for negotiating history did not only resonate in the Serbian press but also the international press. Dan Saxon found that among all three groups, “[t]he ICTY is often perceived as having the ability to formally designate a particular national group with ‘victim’ or ‘perpetrator’ status” (Saxon 2005, 563). The arguments made in the international media to express outrage at Šešelj’s recent acquittal reinforced the concern among Serbs that their place in history was at stake. In an article entitled “Outrage at UN court’s ‘rewriting’ of Balkans wars” historians were cited in addition to legal experts, and the judges in Šešelj’s verdict are accused of “historical revision” (Biddle 2016). They are also criticized for a decision that “is divorced from the reality of what was happening in Croatia and Bosnia,” rather than for, for example, the legal element of having to prove guilt beyond all reasonable doubt and having the adequate evidence to do so (Biddle 2016). Also, the fact that the judges expressed in their decision that the prosecution did a bad job throughout the trial did not satisfy the critics (Bowcott 2016).

The Serbian media responded by taking the discussion a step further: not only was history at stake but also the present. The verdict on Karadžić's case also resulted in fears that the preservation of the Serbian political unit in Bosnia and its legitimacy were in question. Domestic media and domestic actors linked the fact that the first president of Republika Srpska was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity to the possibility that the mere existence of the Serbian republic was threatened. The President of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, declared that “the [Karadžić] judgment cannot have an impact on the destiny of Republika Srpska” and that “Serbia will fully perform its obligations and exercise its rights constituted by the Dayton Agreement, in particular the right to support Republika Srpska and help her survive” (“Predsednik” 2016). While there was no evidence of the international community’s intention to dismantle the Serbian Republic, this fear-mongering hypothesis was all over the Serbian press.

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5 See also Peter Lippman 2008, 38.
The theme of martyrdom was obvious in the Serbian press and was reinforced by a sort of amnesty for the defendants, which they supposedly earned through their participation in the war and defense of the Serbian nation. A reluctance to disapprove of the two individuals was evident in the comments in the press even on the part of those who were not pleased with Karadžić and Šešelj’s political leadership. This attitude of amnesty was usually quite subtle, or unspoken. However one commentator decided to spell it out in the online comments of Blic by explaining that she “did not wholeheartedly support Karadžić’s leadership throughout the entire 1990s but wonders what would’ve been left of the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina if Karadžić and his cronies did not organize the defense” (“Suđenje” 2010). This is exactly the message that Karadžić hoped would be transmitted to his audience.

The examination of the conversations between Blic commentators highlights how this unspoken amnesty became enforced through discursive gestures. For example, two daring online readers decided to question Karadžić’s honesty, one by suggesting that Karadžić “did not defend the Serbian nation, but his armchair,” the other by asking why the accused go into hiding if they have committed no crimes but acted in defense of the nation. While they brought up valid points, both encountered significant resistance and confrontation from other readers, and were told that they have gone “too far,” or would be misunderstood as the allies of the enemy (“Branim” 2010; “Suđenje” 2010). The incident suggests that when one was not convinced with Karadžić’s rhetoric and symbolism, or chose to voice doubts, repercussions followed.

The few in the press who were brave enough to reveal their reservations were overwhelmed by those who supported Karadžić’s use of collective language and interpretation of events. Statements such as “Karadžić is guilty before tried but at least he will tell them the truth” reinforced the symbolism of Karadžić as a martyr, and conformed to Karadžić’s argument that the trial was about national guilt and blame. The trial as portrayed in the media reaffirmed the polarizing discourse that Karadžić produced in his speeches with his place in the “us” group and the ICTY in the “them” group (“Suđenje” 2010).
Support for Šešelj’s “martyrdom” was strong in the Serbian media. Šešelj was referred to as “a man of principles and determination” who has suffered from “misused and politicized justice” (Rovčanin 2016). The readers often commented on his “loyalty,” “patriotism,” and “intelligence,” and voiced their support through countless statements such as “you have my support” and “you have my vote” (Rovčanin 2016; Antić 2015). Among ten comments only one was somewhat critical of the newspaper for acting irresponsible by giving media attention to Šešelj. While this person recognized that attention to Šešelj can incite sensationalism and distract from more important political issues at hand, at no point did this commentator criticize Šešelj or make reference to the crimes that Šešelj was accused of (Rovčanin 2016). The rest of the commentators ignored this comment and continued to voice their support for Šešelj.

In other instances commentators did not ignore signs of disagreement but defended and enforced support for Šešelj. I was surprised to find an article that poked fun at Šešelj, calling out his “primitive political exhibitionism,” and even more surprised that Politika took the chance to publish it. The reaction to the article was however extremely and entirely negative. The author’s ethical values were criticized because he went after “a man who has spent eleven years in prison in a court that has been unable to prove his guilt and has now released him to die amongst his own.” Some commentators criticized the author for not praising Šešelj’s legal and professional expertise at The Hague. They further criticized the newspaper for allowing such a juvenile article to be published (“Politički Rijaliti” 2015). Therefore, while Šešelj could ridicule the international court and its employees in the most overt and degrading ways, anyone who ridiculed Šešelj was quickly and publicly shut down in the Serbian press. Šešelj was therefore not only given amnesty for his crimes but also protected from public mockery.

A reader of Večernje Novosti explained that Šešelj is a man “who always places the interest of his people and his country before anything else.” He continued to explain that Šešelj is “the one who has shown that he is ready to sacrifice himself for his nation and his motherland while others are ready to sacrifice everything and everyone for the armchair.” Other readers pointed out that Šešelj had shown
commitment to his nation even at the cost of his own health because he was recently diagnosed with cancer (Rovčanin 2016). A historian who admitted that in the 1990s Šešelj “spread hatred, encouraged divisionism and worked on behalf of evil,” argued in his article that Šešelj went to battle with The Hague for the right intentions.

According to this author, “in his epic war [against The Hague], Šešelj won.” The article received high praise from the audience who refer to the text as “professional,” “graceful,” and “honest” (Antić 2015). The fact that Šešelj spread hatred during the 1990s war was therefore acknowledged and did not affect his status as a martyr in the Serbian press. The one man’s battle against the international giant was perceived as an epic event that was somehow more significant than his crimes.

The constant circulation of ideas of martyrdom made space for the celebration of slyness and ridicule of international courts in the Serbian media. What made Karadžić and Šešelj even more appealing to the press is that they refused to go underground into hiding. The doubling of Karadžić made him a heroic defender of the nation because he refused to hide and lived an extremely public life in Belgrade ‘serving’ his people as Dr. Dabić. Rather than perceiving his double persona as symptoms of a disordered personality, Karadžić’s doctor persona was perceived as cunning and selfless (Petrović 2015, 366). What is missing from the press is an acknowledgment that if Karadžić was able to pull off the Dragan Dabić personality so well, he could also be putting on a grand act at the Hague, an act that is deceptive in regards to the facts, rather than reflective of the Serbian ‘truth.’ Some of my interviewees argued that in its attempt to ensure Šešelj’s right to defend himself, the ICTY failed to limit his freedom even in circumstances when he ridiculed judges, publicly exposed witnesses under protection, and “destroy[ed] the dignity of the court” (Djordje Popović, Interview, June 23, 2011). However, most perceived this as a positive outcome indicating that Šešelj outsmarted The Hague in a remarkably entertaining way. “Watching Šešelj in court is like watching Big
Brother,” commented a professor of Sociology (Ivan Šijaković, Interview, July 12, 2011). Šešelj’s supporters posted videos from his defence on social media, including vulgar chauvinistic titles such as “Šešelj rapes The Hague.” Such videos have received close to a million hits, which is a remarkably high number for a recording of legal proceedings.

The second section of this paper illustrated how the domestic media responded to and amplified Karadžić and Šešelj’s trial performances. While the section focused on how the media transmitted the defendants’ messages and reproduced the war criminal cult, some of the readers’ comments hinted that the domestic audience bought the story. We have learned from Jack Snyder’s work that this outcome should not be surprising: when people are bombarded with the same information which is packaged to appeal to their predispositions and no alternative is offered, there is a good chance that they will absorb it. Moreover, the defendants on trial are from the same caliber of actors who during the elections in the 1990s exploited the newly free press and hijacked the public debate for illiberal ends (Snyder 2000, 19). These political entrepreneurs understand the power of monumental events, such as elections and trials, and have experience working the media channels.

Many of my quite liberal interviewees who supported the existence of the tribunal and full cooperation with the institution, and called for their societies to admit their guilt and face the past, also bought into the narrative produced by Karadžić and Šešelj. It is not that these interviewees did not believe that the defendants were guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The problem was that they also believed that there were many equally guilty individuals among Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and international actors involved in the conflict who were

6 The interviewee is referring to the popular television reality show Big Brother, rather than the character from George Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

7 To what degree this narrative is internalized by the Serbian public and the various reasons why the war criminal cult resonates at home are larger questions that I address in my book project entitled [In]Humanity on Trial: Domestic Perceptions of International Criminal Tribunals. In the book I argue that media is just one among many factors that contribute to the domestic support for leaders on trial at The Hague.
not brought to trial. In this context, people often made the judgment that supporting their own crooks was better than supporting foreign crooks. They believed their own crooks to be more consistent and trustworthy even if such individuals displayed dual and highly narcissist personas. The prevalent narrative then involved an extremely negative opinion of all of the principal actors in the conflict and in this narrative the ICTY was an extension of that conflict, rather than a righteous institution correcting the moral wrongs of the past. There is no indication in my evidence that the media perceived not playing by the rules of the international court as problematic, and therefore circulated a message of general lack of respect for international law. This context allowed the defendants to portray The Hague as the ultimate evil on the one hand, and to trivialize its importance on the other hand.

This paper traced the process through which Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj constructed the war criminal cult and reinforced a nationalist discourse that emphasized Western imperialistic tendencies. The analysis of the statements the defendants made in court illustrated how an international court can become a podium that grants ‘madmen’ a chance to ‘perform’ and remain relevant in public narratives. Karadžić and Šešelj collectivized their guilt and constituted their trials as national rather than individual. They mobilized nationalism by deploying mythical language and taking advantage of existing coding biases and national frames, which became accepted and generalized during the conflict. This paper illustrated how the defendants revitalized and modified the nation which is important because, as Brubaker explains, “groupness does not remain there out of inertia” (2002, 177). It requires active social and cognitive work to keep it sustained. The Serbian press did little to hamper Karadžić and Šešelj’s ploys to delegitimize and ridicule the court, and instead offered coverage of their spectacles. Through this process war criminals effectively won themselves blanket amnesty at home.

Supporters of the Tribunal argued that televising trial proceedings encouraged the general public to accept how criminal and inhumane the acts of their former leaders were, therefore convincing the public to distance itself from

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8 See also Peskin 2008.
these actors. For example, Gary Bass argues that “[f]or public attitudes to shift, criminal leaders must be tried – their aura of mystery shattered by showing their weaknesses and stupidities” (2000, 288). I disagree with the suggestion that international criminal trials show the “weaknesses and stupidities” of local leaders. The evidence suggests that Karadžić and Šešelj became mythologized rather than delegitimized through the ICTY process.\(^9\) Sabrina Ramet argues that “deprogramming” of the Serbian people might be needed (775). I agree that de-grouping, deconstruction, and de-programming of the nationalist frame is necessary, however, it appears that we cannot expect international institutions to contribute to this goal. Snyder’s point that the international community needs to be able to distinguish circumstances that appear to support important goals in transitional societies, such as democratization, but can result in “a lengthy antidemocratic detour” can also be applied to the objective of establishing the rule of law (2000, 20). In a worldview where global politics is the realm of crooks and The Hague is an extension of these global conflicts, familiar criminals are preferable over foreign criminals.

\(^9\) See also Stahn 2009.
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